

## Jesus Saves the Accused Woman

John 7:53-8:12

Our Scripture passage is not found in some of the oldest manuscripts and so there is some debate among scholars as to whether the paragraph is authentic Scripture. Augustine believed that the paragraph might have been skipped by some scribes due to concern that the passage might weaken the churches' commitment to marital fidelity. We are not troubled by any doubt as to whether this story belongs in the Bible and we are not fearful that Jesus' compassion toward this woman has weakened the Bible's case for the moral and societal advantages of marital exclusivity. In the story Jesus acts as the one who truly was wiser than Solomon and His wisdom needs to be heard by our culture as we are in desperate need of direction. We live in an anything goes world and we are watching the morays of sexual behavior and what is acceptable or not blow up in a very public way.

Think about it this way. What are the factors that limit or curb the practice of deviant behavior? Let me suggest three. One is fear. I have heard that in Singapore they have almost no drug problem at least with street drugs. The penalties for possession or sale of drugs is so severe that no one wants to risk it. People do not sell drugs there because they do not want to spend the rest of their lives in prison. The second factor is shame. If a certain behavior is viewed by a culture as so reprehensible that anyone who participates in such a behavior will no longer be regarded with respect but they are despised and rejected then this kind of shame will motivate many, even the vast majority, of the society to conform to what is regarded as acceptable behavior.

The third factor is the acceptance of a clear moral standard of right and wrong. The Ten Commandments has served as such a standard for Western culture since the time of Christ. If a culture loses the attachment of fear or shame to its moral standard then the individual will begin to evaluate individual choices on the basis of personal advantage. Adhering to the moral absolutes of the commandments

will be determined by a person's conviction as to what is best for them in a particular moment of time. Spiritually, this will become a matter of trust in God or, in other words, our choices will reflect the nature of our relationship with God. The person who trusts God will take seriously God's revelation that His commandments have been given to us for our good and to protect us from harm. His commandments are His will for us and His will is always best. There is no difference in this sense between God's desire for me and my own self-interest. His will is always best.

In the news over the last couple of weeks numbers of powerful and famous men have been accused of sexual abuse, sexual crimes, and sexually inappropriate behavior by women who have worked for them or had contact with them over the years. While there are a few "men of morals" among the accused, the majority belong to the culture which has decreed that what is right is what is right for me and that no one has the right to judge my personal choices. In such a culture there is no fear attached to possible consequences of behavioral choices and no shame attached to these choices either. There is also no accepted moral standard and so what comes is the licentious and entitled behaviors that we are hearing about. What else could you expect?

This culture that is outside the church is also inside the church. It is in the movies and shows and video games that entertain us. It is in the workplace and the classrooms where we spend our days. Non criminal immoral behaviors are not associated with the unpleasant consequences of fear or shame. The only thing left is the absolute standard of right and wrong as in the Ten Commandments and they are only regarded as authoritative if they work for me right now. In this atmosphere our only hope is to walk with God and to treasure our relationship with Him in a way that builds our trust in Him so that we can believe deeply within our souls that God's way is always best.

In our story, the religious elite have willingly compromised their commitment to obey the Scriptures. Their object had become to take Jesus down and thus their object was no longer to obey God and to do His will. One question is, did they come up with the question first or did they come up with the woman first? This is

not answerable but it points out the nature of their motives. In the law, both the man and the woman were held responsible for the consequences of adultery. You cannot catch a woman in the act without also catching the man and so they were not concerned with the law but with trapping Jesus. Their immorality was in their lack of fear or shame or any sense of the absolute that would limit their options.

They thought that they had laid a perfect trap for Jesus. If Jesus said that they should not stone the woman then they would accuse Him of lifting Himself above the law. If Jesus agreed that the woman should be stoned then they would have immediately blamed Him for the death of the woman and accused Him before the Roman authorities.

Jesus did not give them the direct answer they sought. He stooped down and wrote on the ground and then after a time said, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." Then He wrote on the ground some more. The crowd gradually went away and left Jesus alone with the woman. He asked her, "Where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She answered, "No one Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

The woman had apparently gotten past the issues of fear and shame so that she made a choice based on what she wanted for now rather than upon the commandments. Jesus revealed the heart of God that always wants to give good gifts and called her back to a life lived within the protective boundaries that God has provided for us.

From this, Jesus turned to make the claim, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." This was the new life that Jesus called the woman to in contrast to the darkness represented by her own former life and that of the religious leaders.